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The Wise Gray Cat

by

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To
my little pupils of
Miss Mills' School

THE NEW YORK
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THE WISE GRAY CAT

ONCE there was a Wise Gray Cat who lived in a cottage near the forest. She often sat in her doorway on pleasant days, smoothing her shining coat with her tongue and watching the passersby. One summer afternoon, while she was sitting there, in the warm sunshine, she heard a small, strange sound. It was like nothing that she had ever heard in all her lives, for she had already

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lived seven of her nine lives, and having very sharp ears had heard a great deal.

"Tick-tick, tick-tick!" came the little noise again. Wise Gray Cat heard it quite plainly, but though she cocked her head on one side and listened carefully, she had no idea what it could be. So she called her friend Happy-go-hop, the frog.

Happy-go-hop came springing along with his flute tucked under his arm, for he had been practicing a new tune, down by the silvery pond.

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"Listen! Happy-go-hop," said Gray Cat, "what do you hear?"

"Tick-tick, tick-tick!" the little noise kept saying, down in the grass.

"It must be the grass growing," said Happy-go-hop, shutting one eye and listening.

"I never heard the grass growing," said the Wise Gray Cat, "but I cannot think it sounds like that."

"I will ring the chimes, and call the Little People," suggested Happy-go-hop, "they can tell us."

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So he went down to the edge of the pond, where the blue bells grew, and he shook one of the stems till all the tiny bells rang the merriest chime you ever heard. The next minute the air was filled with wee, shimmering things, pale green and thin, so that you could see right through them, and a minute after a crowd of Little People had gathered around Wise Gray Cat and Happy-go-hop.

"Little People," said Wise Gray Cat, "we should like to know, if you please, how the grass sounds when it is growing?"

"Does it sound like that?" asked the Frog. All the Little People took off their caps so they could hear the "Tick-Tick" sound better.

"Not at all," said one of the Little People.

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"Not at all," echoed all the others.

"They listened for a moment and then they all scampered over to a tuft of long grass, and they joined hands and danced around it in a ring. And as they danced they sang:

"Listen, if you must be told!
It is a little watch of gold!"

"A gold watch!" exclaimed Wise Gray Cat, much excited.

"Br-rr-um! Br-rr-um!" began Happy-go-hop; "I thought of that."

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"We must find the owner, br-rr-um, br-rr-um!" said Happy-go-hop.

"Yes indeed, we must find the owner," echoed all the Little People.

So they hung the watch on a strong reed that the frog brought from the edge of the silvery pond, and six of the Little People lifted it on their shoulders, and away they started to find the owner of the tiny gold watch. They walked where the ground was

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smooth, so they would not jar it, and Wise Gray Cat and Happy-go-hop followed along, close behind, to inquire of the people they met. They went on, through a meadow, and met Funny Bunny, the brown rabbit.

"Funny Bunny," asked Wise Gray Cat, "have you lost a little gold watch?"

"No, Mrs. Wise Gray Cat," answered Funny Bunny;

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"Ask all you meet,
And see what they say,
If you do not find out,
I will tell you a way."

And before they could ask him another question, he whisked his hind legs in the air and raced off so fast that they could not overtake him.

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Soon they came to Black Bear's hut, and found him sitting in his doorway reading a paper.

'Black Bear," said the Wise Gray Cat, "do you know anyone who has lost a little gold watch?" And Happy-go-hop added: "We have found one, you see, and we are looking for the owner."

Black Bear put on his big, horn-rimmed spectacles and looked all through the Lost and Found Column of his paper, but nobody there had lost or found a gold watch, or at least nobody had advertised one.

At this Wise Gray Cat, for all her wisdom, felt very much discouraged. But Happy-go-hop said: "Oh, cheer up, Mrs. Wise Gray Cat, we shall find the owner before the little watch needs winding again.

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So they went on until they came to the Badger's home, in the heart of the forest, and there stood Badger at a work-bench in front of his house, and he was trying to make a tiny violin.

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"Good day, Mr. Badger," said Mrs. Wise Gray Cat, "do you happen to know anyone who has lost a little gold watch?"

"Cannot you guess?" asked the Badger, looking very very wise indeed.

"I cannot guess," answered Wise Gray Cat, with a puzzled air.

"I cannot guess," said Happy-go-hop, popping his eyes very wide open in his effort to think.

Just then one of the Little People, took off his cap and swung it in the air and cried: "I know whom you mean! It is Feefay!"

Then all the other Little People took off their caps and swung them in the air, and echoed: "Feefay!" And they shouted it so

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very loud that the Wise Gray Cat's ears rang with their shrill little voices.

"Why do you want Feefay?" said a sweet, small voice just above their heads, and they all looked up, and there, sure enough, was Feefay riding on her white bumble bee.

"We should like to know if you please, Feefay, who has lost a little gold watch?" said Wise Gray Cat.

"Of course; I will tell you, very willingly," answered Feefay. "But first you must show me the little gold watch." So the Little People carried the watch to Feefay, and then she said: "Mrs. Wise Gray Cat will you please open the case?"

Then Wise Gray Cat opened the case of

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the watch with her clever paws and Feefay passed her wand across the face of it three times. At once there appeared a picture of the little girl to whom the watch belonged. And who do you think it was?

Why, it was little Princess Finette.

"It is Princess Finette," said Feefay, "and she will be very unhappy if she has lost her little gold watch."

"We must send the little gold watch to Princess Finette at once," cried all the Little People.

"Br-rr-um, br-rr-um," began Happy-go-hop, "who will take it up to the Castle?"

"Wait a moment," said Wise Gray Cat, shaking her head.

"What are we waiting for?" blustered

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Happy-go-hop. "Little Princess Finette will be sad when she finds her watch is lost. It should be returned to her at once."

But the Little People said nothing, for they had learned to respect Wise Gray Cat, and she was saying nothing, only shaking her head. Finally she spoke in a sad tone of voice:

"If you will all sit down," she said very soberly, "I will tell you the story of my life."

Now Happy-go-hop did not care much for stories unless he was telling them himself, so he started in: "Br-rr-um, br-rr-um!" and was probably going to make another objection, had not the Little People chorused:

"Yes, tell us the story of your life! Tell us the story of your life!"

So they all made a fairy ring around Wise

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Gray Cat, while Happy-go-hop found a comfortable, damp spot under the edge of a stone, and everybody looked polite and listened as hard as possible.

Wise Gray Cat sat up very straight in the middle of the circle, and licked her whiskers and then she began:

"A long, long time ago; seven lifetimes ago,—for I have two more left of my nine lives—I was a kitten, and I belonged to the wife of the gardener up at the Castle, where lives little Princess Finette. The gardener's wife was good to me and I had a fine time lapping cream and playing with my tail, until I was a full grown cat. It was then that a terrible adventure befell me.

"One day when I was sleeping harmlessly

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in the sun, I was rudely awakened to find I had been pushed into a dirty sack by a gang of rude small boys.

"I felt myself being carried along by these wicked boys, who were talking about what further fearful things they were going to do to me. Just when I was near to having a fit with the terror of it all, I heard a man's voice! Never shall I forget my great relief! Men are not always kind but they are never so cruel as some boys.

The man asked the boys what they had there; made them stop, and took the sack

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from them. When he began to speak to me gently, in the tone which my master and mistress had always used toward me, I grew quiet at once. Then he untied the sack and I gave one great leap—"

"Br-rr-um, tootle-ootle—" came a sound from the damp spot under the edge of the stone. Happy-go-hop was quietly thinking over the new tune he had been practicing down by the silvery pond, and, not caring in the least for stories (except the ones he told

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himself), he had so far forgotten his manners as to begin trying it again upon his flute.

Wise Gray Cat got up indignan y, and turned around with her back toward Happy-go-hop, then she sat down again, and repeated:

"As I was saying, when I was interrupted, I gave one great leap out of the mouth of the bag and over the man's arms. I must have leaped as high as the top of the gardener's cottage—"

"Brr—" croaked Happy-go-hop, but Wise Gray Cat did not appear to hear.

"I was a great leaper in those days," she continued.

"You must have been!" agreed all the Little People.

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Wise Gray Cat smiled a wise smile, and went on: "When I came down I ran for the forest, ran way into the middle of the deepest, darkest part, and there I have stayed in the wood cutter's cottage ever since.

"Brr-rr-um! If you please," asked Happy-go-hop, "what has all this to do with the little gold watch?"

Wise Gray Cat turned sharply around and looked at him. "That is the first sensible thing you have said this afternoon, but if you could have waited a moment I was coming to it.

"You may be sure I never forgot the face of the kind man who let me out of that bag. He is one of the footmen at the Castle, and whenever he passes in the path by the forest it makes me feel so good, just to see him,

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that I purr a long time. This very day I saw him go by with an armful of parcels. It was not long after that, I heard the 'Tick-tick, tick-tick!' in the grass, and I am very much afraid that it was he who dropped the little gold watch which belongs to Princess Finette."

"Oh, let us take it back to her at once," cried the Little People.

"But do you not see," said Wise Gray Cat, "if we take it back to the Princess, her Father the King will know that it has been lost, and the faithful footman will be in as deep trouble as I was the day that the boys put me in the terrible bag. If the footman lost the little gold watch he will be coming to look for it. The best thing to do is to

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carry it back and put it in the grass where it was in the first place. The footman is faithful and he will return and find it and take it straight to Princess Finette."

At this all the Little People were so delighted that they joined hands once more, and danced around the watch singing:

"Take the watch back,
Along the same track,
The footman will come,
And carry it home.
Then nothing will fret,
Dear Princess Finette!"

The moment they were through with their song they took up the reed, hung the watch

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upon it, and skipped lightly away through the deep shade of the forest, with Wise Gray Cat and Happy-go-hop hurrying behind.

When they reached the place where they had found the watch at first, Wise Gray Cat showed the Little People where to hide it, in the grass at the foot of an old stump, near to the path, but where it would not be seen and picked up by a stranger.

In a short while they heard steps coming along the path, for all the people of the forest can hear much better than we can.

Sure enough! it was the footman approaching, with bent head, examining every inch of the ground. At once Wise Gray Cat began to purr, Happy-go-hop stopped tootleing, and the Little People left

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off their game and hung poised in the air, to see what was going to happen.

The footman was far too worried to notice Wise Gray Cat; he did not see Happy-go-hop at all; and his eyes were not sharp enough to make out anything as small as the Little People, though if he had happened to catch sight of them he would have supposed they were only midges. So he went on with his search, never thinking how many friendly eyes were watching him and hoping he would come upon the watch.

Once he went so near to the place where the watch lay, that the Little People's wings trembled with joy, Wise Gray Cat stood up on the log, and as for

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Happy-go-hop, he blushed perfectly orange under his chin, with excitement. But the footman did not see the watch, and its merry "Tick-tick, tick-tick!" was so small that he could not hear it.

At last he gave up hunting and sat down, right on the old stump, beside which the watch was hidden. He put his head in his hands and sat there for what seemed a very long time, looking so discouraged, and dreadfully worried.

"If only it had not been Princess Finette's birthday," he said to himself at last, "I should not have cared so much. But she was so disappointed when she opened her gifts and did not find the little gold watch for which she has been wishing. She will never say a

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word, for she is too sweet a little Princess to complain. But when the old King finds out that the watch is lost, and that his little daughter has been disappointed, I do not know what ever will happen to me! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! How could I have been so careless!"

At this the Little People could stand it no longer. They were very much afraid that the footman would go away without finding the watch after all. Suddenly, the largest of the Little People screamed out: "Feefay! Feefay!" for there she was, riding past on her white bumble bee. It was such a tiny little scream that the footman did not hear it at all. But Feefay heard, and guided the white bumble bee

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nearer, while the largest of the Little People told the story, just as fast as he could. The footman heard that, but he thought it was the singing of a mosquito.

As soon as Feefay understood what was the matter she said: "Why, that is very simple. Wait just a moment."

Then she flew over and waved her tiny wand across the eyes and ears of the footman and at once he could see and hear as well as any of the forest people, as well even as Wise

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Gray Cat. Then Feefay flew away on her white bumble bee, for she had done all she could.

At once the footman raised his head and his eyes began to shine. "What is that?" he said. For just as plainly as could be, because Feefay had made his ears so sharp, he heard the little gold watch concealed in the grass going, "Tick-tick, tick-tick!"

He looked down, at the side of the old stump, and just as plainly as could be (because Feefay had made his eyes so sharp) he saw the little gold watch shining through the grass.

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Then the faithful footman gave a happy shout, and picked up the watch and waved it in the air. "Oh, if only Princess Finette were here this minute, so that I might give it into her hands! But she has gone driving and I shall have to wait—why, there is the carriage now!"

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Sure enough, along the smooth, broad road that runs past the forest, was passing the blue and gold coach of the Princess Finette. The Wise Gray Cat and Happy-go-hop and all the Little People could hear the coachman blowing his gold trumpet, and they could see the coach shining through the trees. They could even see Wee Dog, sitting beside the coachman, up on the high seat.

The footman gave another glad shout. Such a loud, glad shout that the coachman reined in the white horses and stopped the coach, and there they all could see the sweet face of the Little Princess Finette, as she leaned out of the window, to see what all this joyful noise was about.

Then the footman jumped right over the

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Wise Gray Cat, who was purring about his feet, and ran to the carriage, with all the Little People and Happy-go-hop and the Wise Gray Cat watching to see what would happen. The footman handed the watch to the Princess,

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with a very low bow. She laughed in delight, and then clapped her hands and kissed it, so pleased to have it for her birthday after all.

At once the coachman blew his gold trumpet, the faithful footman jumped up behind the coach, and away they went, shining and glittering, blue and gold, between the trunks of the trees, with Wee Dog wagging his tail and barking like mad.

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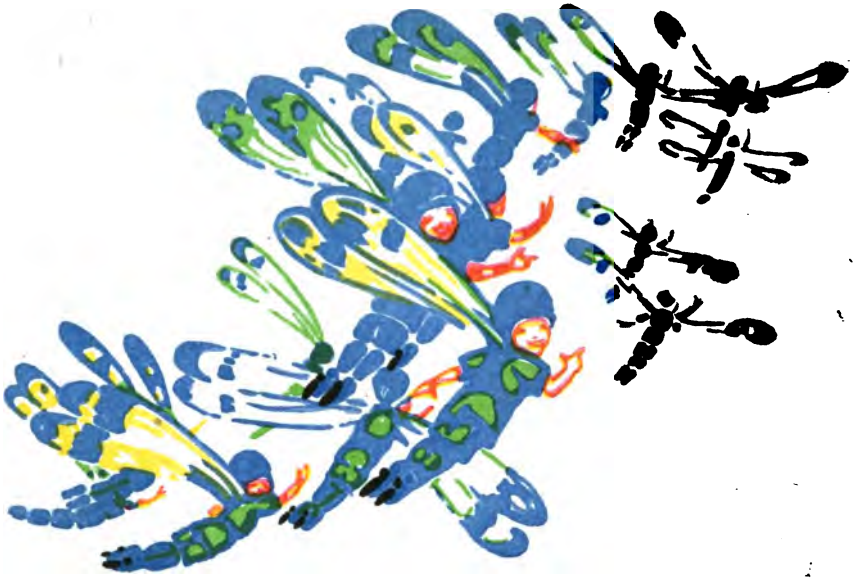

"Br-rr-um!" said Happy-go-hop, "I knew the footman would find it." But nobody paid the least attention to him. The Little People flew away, laughing so loudly that it sounded like a peal of tiny bells, and the Wise

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Gray Cat strolled toward the wood-cutter's cottage, purring such a great, big, shaking purr, that it made all the leaves on the trees clap their hands.

As for the faithful footman, he told Princess Finette everything that had happened to the little gold watch as far as he knew, which was not half so much as we know about it.

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And when the old King, who was growing very old, and could no longer hear very well or see very well, found out what wonderful sight and hearing belonged to the footman, he made him his body servant. That means, that the faithful footman always goes about with the King now and has the most delicious things to eat, and wears a red velvet suit, and carries a big shining sword.

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